A Single Decision (Take Two)

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Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]
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Chapter 3

Black smoke from ravaged towers and crashed warships still filled the skies of Coruscant, a day after the battle. A hush had fallen over the world-city, the quiet of fear and defeat. Grievous had come, and just like the flood he spoke of in his brief address, he had swept away all opposition, before vanishing back into the night. But while others despaired, Admiral Wilhuff Tarkin stood on his balcony and thought about what he was going to do. With Palpatine dead, there was going to be some chaos in the government, to put it lightly.

"We thought this war would be over soon." Shayla Paige-Tarkin said, his kinswoman and senator of their home sector. "I think it just got much longer."

"No doubt." agreed Tarkin.

"If the Separatists can break the sieges in the Sluis sector, Eriadu may come under attack." Shayla paced about, hands clasped. "I very much desire to return home and safeguard our people."

"I understand wholly. But you have duties here, do you not?"

"Yes..."

"I do not mean to sound over-eager, but perhaps I could fulfill them while you defended Eriadu?" suggested Tarkin. Shayla paused, looking conflicted.

"You'd have to resign your commission with the Navy." she said.

"I'm a patriot, I will be happy serving the Republic in whatever way it needs me to, in battle or in politics."

"Yes... Very well, I will make the arrangements. Are you sure, though?" asked Shayla.

He smiled. "Completely." *Senator Tarkin* had a nice ring to it.

"I can't say I'm going to miss Chancellor Palpatine." said Master Windu. "The power he gathered was worrying. But I also can't deny he was exactly what the Republic needed to get through this war."

"My sentiments as well, Master Windu." agreed Bail Organa, standing before the Jedi Council. "I believe we'll miss Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker more, though."

"Dead, Obi-Wan, is not." Yoda spoke, looking past everyone in the room, as if he were seeing some hidden place none of the others were aware of. "A great disturbance in the Force, there has been. See no more, I can." The other Jedi masters nodded.

"I'd be glad to know if he was alive. But the facts are, we have not even heard mention of him since the battle." Bail said.

"This is true." Master Ki-Adi-Mundi's hologram nodded once. "We must maintain hope for Master Kenobi, and in the mean time, turn our attention to something else that we can effect." *That* would be what Bail had come to speak about, on the Jedi's request.

"Yes, Republic law has it that the Vice Chair fulfill the remaining term of the Chancellorship in case of situations like that. Mas Amedda will be acting as Supreme Chancellor for the next seven months, until Palpatine's term is completed. As fate has it, if he had been elected for a third term before the war, then his fourth would be coming up later this year. Then the Republic will have its first election for the Chancellorship in quite some time." The Jedi glanced among each other.

"Mas Amedda?" asked Master Windu.

"I'm not happier at the notion than you are." said Bail. "But the law is the law."

"So it is." Ki-Adi-Mundi said. "Do you have any idea of who the frontrunners for the Chancellorship might be?"

"No one will vote for Amedda, I assure you of that. Otherwise, it's a mystery. I suppose we'll find out in a week when the campaigning begins."

"Just what the Republic needs right now... Months of political infighting." Saesee Tiin sighed.

"We'll just have to weather it." said Master Windu. "Thank you for seeing us, Senator Organa."

Even the Holonet was quiet today. No one really knew what to do now that Palpatine was dead, and the illusion of safety shattered. Military reports to the Senate had told that the conflict was winding down. The Confederacy had been driven back into its Outer Rim heartland, its most important worlds held tightly under siege. Despite what the fear-mongering media said, the war was well on its way to ending.

Bail had believed that until today. Dooku and Grievous, the two most feared individuals in the galaxy, had more tricks up their sleeves than they let on. If they were capable of staging such an attack so supposedly late in the war, what else could they do? He had begun to doubt that the fight was anywhere close to finished. Perhaps the fear-mongers had been right the entire time.

Just because it was night on Utapau didn't mean the rest of the galaxy was asleep. Message after message was piling up for General Grievous. Grievous didn't answer any of the calls. The issue of Sidious was his foremost concern, or rather, where Sidious was. A chilling notion occurred to him: what if Sidious had been accidentally killed in his attack on Coruscant? No, that was impossible. Such a powerful Sith lord would not be killed by mere accident. Fate did not work that way. Not for Grievous.

The console continued to beep at him. *Everyone* wanted to talk to him tonight. Or rather, they wanted to talk to Dooku. Grievous brought up the list of deliberately missed calls. In retrospect, immediately taking control of Dooku's privileges and powers, including re-routing messages for the Confederacy's Head of State to himself, hadn't been the best idea. Predictably, much of it mundane civilian tripe like requests for endorsements or permissions to do this and that. There was no hint of Sidious.

However, there was one message addressed to Grievous himself, concerning a war report. At least *that* might be worth answering... Grievous responded to the hail, out of curiosity more than anything else. In moments, the hologram of a haggard Slussi appeared, in full regalia of gilt armor and rich robes. "General." he said, with a nod.

"I don't know you." Grievous said back. "What business do you have with me?"

"I am Candobar Inglet, Khedive of Sluis Van. I have spent the last five months fighting the Republic." said he, as his hologram flickered and shook. Republic artillery must have been nearby, Grievous had seen those effects before. "And I have done so unfailingly. We have fought day and night without recourse, and we have held the line here."

"Do you expect congratulations for doing your job?" asked Grievous, reclining in his chair and trying not to cough too harshly.

"I expect the Confederacy to aid its own!" snapped the Khedive. He shook a fist in anger, his voluminous robes revealing how thin his arms were. "My sipahis and their droids forces have not failed, but my people are starving!"

"I thought Sluissi were known for their calmness and patience..." Grievous taunted.

"My list of options is growing thin, General." The Khedive sank back down on his long tail. "It was my destiny from birth to safeguard my people, and now I see them collapsing in the streets for want of food. The Republic's defoliants have destroyed our croplands, they have poisoned our livestock, and they shoot down every blockade runner they can. I presumed one such as you would be able to find a modicum of understanding of this situation, one lord of a suffering nation to another."

Now it was Grievous's turn to snap. "You presume much, serpent! If you seek to press me to action with threats of surrender-"

"Do not question my integrity, Grievous; I assure you, I have never fled from a fight, and I will not start now." the Sluissi said, sneering. Grievous growled back, but let him continue on. "I will resist the Republic to my last breath. That last breath is not far off; we will all die of hunger before we are defeated in battle. Then you will be deprived of our shipyards, our engineers, and the greatest fortress of this sector. This is not the end I would have for my people, nor for our cause. But it is the end I see, nonetheless."

"Bold words, serpent. What would you have me do?"

"You are at Utapau now, with your entire fleet, so my intelligence tells me. Strike now while the Republic grieves for the death of their dictator, and you may just drive them off. Our facilities would be at your disposal for repairs and refitting..." The Khedive said, before giving the slightest hint of a smile. "It would look good start, I think, for your first action of Head of State to be that of liberating a starving world from its invaders."

"How do you know that?" Grievous sat up quickly, trying to grab at the Sluissi's hologram before he could stop himself.

"An educated guess. My delegate in Congress has reported that Dooku did not appear as scheduled after the attack, with no notification of his absence either. Your reaction has merely confirmed my suspicions."

"You are brave, serpent, I cannot deny that. Continue your fight, we will see how things go." With that, Grievous shut off communication. He rubbed his hands together, considering what the Khedive had said. There was much work that needed to be done, and no one to tell him where to start. Maybe having so much responsibility wouldn't be good after all.

The serpent's words resounded in his mind for the next hour, as he ignored more civilian calls addressed to Dooku. *One lord of a suffering nation to another...* Vague recollections came to Grievous. He knew he had a life before his transformation, but when he tried to recall details, almost everything as a blur. It was something to think on for another time. The Khedive was right, that was what was clear at the present. It *would* be bad if Sluis Van fell to the Republic. He sprang to his feet, and activated his communicator. "Dofine!" he barked.

"Uh- um, yes, General?" asked the Nemoidian, in a tired voice.

"Tell the captains to return to their ships, and fire up their engines. We're heading out."

"We are? Very well, General. Some warning would have been appreciated, though."

"War does not wait on the weary, Dofine."

While Esera Komara was unable to come to war meetings, the war meetings came to her. Fellow Jedi knight Ardabur Aspar, Commander Thamyris, and some other clones she hadn't bothered to learn the names of all piled into the former classroom she was recovering in. There wasn't much to talk about in consideration of their own battle, but everyone had plenty to say about Grievous's attack.

"I can't believe it, myself." a clone from the 14th Legion said.

"It must have been one hell of a strategy, on the part of the Clanker-in-Chief." Thamyris added.

"As far as I've heard from Admiral Screed's public statements, the Home Fleet has been continuously stripped of warships to reinforce the Outer Rim Sieges." said Aspar. "It's no wonder Grievous was able to attack nearly unopposed for almost sixteen hours."

"Our friends in the militia are calling for justice for the murder of the Chancellor and General Skywalker." The 14th Legion clone smirked grimly. "I say we let them. The Chancellor was a helpless old man, murdered in cold blood by that droid monster."

"Can't say it's a bad idea." Thamyris said. "We've been exceedingly patient with these traitors, thanks to General Komara here. Maybe too patient."

"We're not killing anyone who isn't shooting at us." Esera scolded. "I'm as shocked as any of you by what that half-droid madman's done, but we can't let it cloud our judgment. We *must* show restraint."

"With respect to my colleague, I disagree." Aspar paced to and fro by her bed, staring down at her with his hawkish face. "We need to teach these Separatists a lesson. Wanton destruction and slaughter is not excusable, and will be met with reciprocated force."

"So how does that make us different from Grievous?" asked Esera.

"My young friend," sighed Aspar, putting a hand on her shoulder, "one day you will learn the difference between legally restoring order and committing treasonous mayhem."

"You're not *that* much older than me." Esera muttered.

He spoke on: "The Republic is order. The Republic is law. We Jedi fight to maintain the law and order of the Republic. Sometimes, harsh measures are needed, but in the end, everyone will be brought back under on order, one law, one system, one state. And *then* we will have the peace you so love to talk about. Best you remember that, Komara."

Aspar's one order would be a bloody one, that was for sure. "You sound like a Sith from one of those old stories." she said.

The other Jedi snorted. "Cute."

"I hate to interrupt a Jedi chat, sir, but I just got word our pickets to the south are reporting activity." the 14th Legion clone said. Thamyris put on his helmet.

"We better go check this out." he said.

"If you know any Force healing techniques, now would be the time to apply them." Aspar said. "We may need you out there."

"Sure you will." Esera crossed her arms. Her direct combat skills were weak, Aspar knew that firsthand. Back at the Temple, in happier days, she'd preferred the problem-solving and negotiation exercises, her master had taught her that was a Jedi's *first* course of action. But even when they'd practiced a Jedi's *last* course of action, she'd never been very good at it. In the spirit of how fast the Temple was churning out Knights for the war, a run-in with a swarm of droidekas had been accepted as her trial of skill... Not exactly an impressive feat compared to Jedi like the late Skywalker. All Esera could do now was meditate and hope nothing serious was happening outside.

Her hope failed when explosions sounded in the south. *Are the droids attacking?* Esera wondered. *Why?* They'd been trapped in those hills for months, and didn't seem intent on breaking out. But the sounds of battle drew ever-closer, and she could hear the distinctions between them. AATs were on the loose, the sizzling of their energy shells was unmistakable. Missiles shrieked in the distance, blasters rang out. And they drew closer. She sat up in her bed, and tried to look out the window; there was smoke out there.

"General," said a clone of her own legion, opening the door, "we're going to need to evacuate this building, for the moment. The Seps managed to sneak by our watchposts and take us on the flank."

"Do so." Esera said. "I will leave last, in case they show up before you're finished."

"Understood." The clone left. He must not have known she couldn't actually walk. Regardless, her master had always said that a Jedi was the last one out of a dangerous situation, because she would be able to survive longest in one.

Half a hour passed, the battle growing ever-nearer. The hospital was abuzz with energy, as the clones evacuated their wounded brothers. At last, she could see movement outside. The clones fell back in an orderly fashion, beyond were the attackers. An AAT moved around the corner, painted with patches of dull green, brown, and white. Sheets of mesh had been crudely welded onto the central hull and turret sides for some reason, and its power converters and cannons were wrapped in some kind of canvas. Behind it came a motley mix of droids and militia. These men were better armored than their city counterparts, though just as mismatched in equipment.

A missile shot out to meet the Separatist tank, but it exploded harmlessly against the mesh. *I guess that's why they put it there...* Someone in their camp was creative. "Trooper?" Esera called, trying to summon the clone she'd talked to earlier. He did not come. "Great..." she sighed. Now how was she supposed to escape with a broken leg still two days from recovery? As far as she knew, she wasn't. "They left me behind on purpose, I bet." Esera placed her lightsaber at her side, and stared crossly at the wall in front of her.

The Separatists arrived minutes later.

Author's note on things only nerds care about: By my reckoning, ROTS took place in what can only be called (for lack of better word) April or May, 19 BBY. Just under halfway into the third year of war. If Sheev was elected in 32 BBY and then again in 28 BBY, he should have been up for election again in 24 BBY (Separatist crisis happened though), and then for a fourth term in 20 BBY. As he was never elected for these latter two terms, I've decided that the two years between the Separatist crisis and start of the three years of war aren't being counted, bumping the theoretical third election to 22 BBY. Now with 18 BBY about half a year off, that gives the Republic about seven months to find people to run for office. It's a rough bunch of math, but having someone as passive and uncharismatic as Mas Amedda in power for three years of the story really doesn't suit my narrative interests. Another issue of concern is dating. No, not courtship between young couples, that's for normal people, I have a Star Wars AU fanfic that turns the basic premise of Star Wars on its head to write. I mean chronological dating. At some point in the future, I will introduce the chronology I've chosen to use. It uses the Ruusan Reformation as year 0, putting us in the year 981. Not entirely relevant at the moment, but it will be eventually.

Oh yeah, I've just realized my chapters are divided based on what I think is a good place to divide them at, not a word length, so maybe I'll scale my updates to reflect their size instead of sticking to every Friday. Or maybe not. I really should have thought this through before diving in...

< Prev | 3. Chapter 3: Changing Courses | Next >

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